

A photograph of a river flowing through a lush forest. On the right side, a large, layered rock formation or cliff rises from the water's edge. The water is calm, reflecting the surrounding greenery and the sky. The trees are dense and vibrant green, suggesting a healthy ecosystem. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

Kickapoo Reserve
Management Board

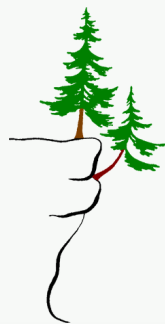
Biennial Report

FY 2020-2021

*Kickapoo River
Kickapoo Valley Reserve
La Farge, WI*

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Kickapoo Valley Reserve
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Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center

Agency Overview

The Kickapoo Valley Reserve (KVR) lies in the heart of the ecologically-diverse Driftless Region. The 8,600-acre property offers exceptional recreational opportunities including hiking, mountain biking, canoeing/kayaking, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, and camping, that attract visitors from across the Midwest and beyond.

In compliance with Wisconsin State Statute 41.41 (3), the Kickapoo Reserve Management Board (KRMB) manages the KVR “to preserve and enhance its unique environmental, scenic and cultural features, to provide facilities for the use and enjoyment of visitors to the reserve and to promote the reserve as a destination for vacationing and recreation.”

Over 50 miles of primarily shared use trail, 15.7 miles of riverway, and 26 campsites are maintained by KVR staff to support sustainable use by visitors. Forest, grassland, and wetland habitats are managed to enhance biodiversity and maintain ecological integrity. The significant natural and cultural resources of the KVR also provide exceptional educational opportunities, and thousands of adult and young learners benefit from the KVR’s diverse education programming annually.

Kickapoo Valley Reserve Mission Statement

"The land in the Kickapoo Valley Reserve shall be protected, preserved, and enhanced so that its unique environmental, scenic, and cultural features provide opportunities for the use and enjoyment of visitors to the Reserve. The Reserve will be promoted as a unique example of the Driftless Area Ecoregion and as a destination for low-impact tourism and education."

Kickapoo Reserve Management Board

Member	Affiliation
Tina Brown	Ho-Chunk Nation
Susan Cushing (Vice-chair)	Local Resident
Travis Downing (Secretary)	Local Resident
Scott Lind	Local Resident
Adlai Mann	Ho-Chunk Nation
Dave Maxwell	Tourism
Reggie Nelson	Local Resident
William Quackenbush	Environment
Richard Wallin (Chair)	Watershed Resident
Julie Hoel	Education
Luke Zahm	Watershed Resident

Kickapoo Valley Reserve Staff

FTE	
Dr. Scott Walter	Executive Director
Jason Leis	Property Manager/Law Enforcement
Erica Cronk	Executive Assistant
Jonel Kiesau	Education Director
LTE	
Ben Johnston	Forestry Technician
Jackie Yocum	Parks & Recreation Specialist
Robin Hosemann	Education Specialist



Message from our Executive Director



12 October, 2021

Dear Governor Evers, Members of the Wisconsin State Legislature, and citizens of the great state of Wisconsin:

On behalf of the Kickapoo Reserve Management Board and pursuant to s. 504(1)(d) of the Wisconsin State Statutes, I am extremely pleased to present this FY 2020 – 2021 biennial report. Contained herein are synopses of the great resource protection, education, and nature-based tourism work conducted by our staff during the recent biennium, as well as an outline of our agency's goals moving forward.

The KRMB oversees policy development and operations for the 8,600-acre Kickapoo Valley Reserve, a property with a unique and rich history. Among the largest public land holdings in southern Wisconsin, the KVR provides exceptional year-round outdoor recreational opportunities, the unique ability to manage for diverse natural communities at the landscape scale, and an extremely active and growing education program that connects citizens to nature in fun and impactful ways. Notable is the recent establishment of the Kickapoo Valley Forest School, an on-site public charter school developed in partnership with the La Farge school district that offers an immersive, nature-based curriculum to facilitate the development of a land ethic among tomorrow's conservation leaders. We are also in the final phases of a massive upgrade to our educational exhibit space.

Lying within the ancient homeland of the Ho-Chunk Nation and occupying the site of a failed federal flood control project that displaced 149 local farm families, the KVR has a strong and unique connection to the past. We recognize and celebrate this past by working together toward a future focused on the mission to which we have been entrusted: to protect and preserve the natural and cultural resources of this wonderful corner of the Driftless Area and to maximize opportunities for our constituents to enjoy them. Our 11-member Board is composed of local citizens that each bring unique expertise and perspective to discussions; this leadership structure is critical to ensuring that decisions appropriately address contemporary issues and that our work maximizes the positive value of the KVR for Wisconsin's citizens.

I hope you find this document informative and, like me, come away reinvigorated by the incredible work being done by our public servants and an enhanced appreciation for the unique values embodied by the Kickapoo Valley Reserve.

Respectfully,

Scott

Dr. Scott Walter
Executive Director

Education

The KVR Education Program is dedicated to sustaining the mission of the KVR by offering hands-on nature education that cultivates knowledge and interest in the preservation and protection of our natural resources. This mission is achieved via numerous specific offerings:

1 School Groups

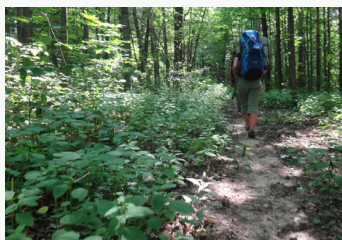
The KVR is a special destination for thousands of students and teachers annually to experience day-long field trips exploring topics from canoe skills to pond science and animal tracking.



In 2020, the Wisconsin DPI awarded the Kickapoo Valley Forest School a \$700,000 grant to develop an early childhood public charter school in partnership with the local La Farge School District, further strengthening our commitment to teaching the next generation of environmental stewards.

2 Summer Camp

The KVR offers hundreds of campers ranging in age from preschool to high school the opportunity to participate in weeklong camps each summer on the KVR.



3 Workshops & Driftless Dialogue

The KVR Education Program provides monthly opportunities to hike, learn, and listen to presentations from local, state, and national experts on a range of natural resource and preservation topics.



- 32 4K-Kindergarten students
- Growing to 64 4K-2nd Grade students by 2023
- Full weather immersion
- Child led learning through nature based play
- 1:8 Adult to child ratio
- Onsite at the 8600 acre Kickapoo Valley Reserve
- Oversight provided by an elected Governance Council



Education

4 Events

The KVR offers seasonal educational events for the whole family. From Winter Festival to the Dam Challenge Triathlon and the Creative Communities Art event, there is something for everyone.



Winter Festival

A free unique winter event filled with outdoor family fun. Watch the sled dogs race, take a ride on a horse drawn sleigh and so much more.

800

People bundled up for winter



Dam Challenge

Registered participants paddle 7 miles, bike 14 miles and run 3 miles in the Dam Challenge Triathlon each October.

500

Race capacity



Creative Communities

Is a free to enter art exhibit, workshop and fundraiser for people of all ages and abilities, bringing art to the community.

350

Artists of all ages

Education Facilities



Prairie Springs
CLASSROOM
Kickapoo Valley Reserve



Traditional Ho-Chunk Chiiporoke



Kickapoo Valley Reserve
Visitor Center

Education Program by the Numbers

The KVR Visitor Center closed March 15, 2020 - June 30, 2021 due to COVID-19.

50+

Instructors & Volunteers

The KVR contracts and utilizes Outdoor and Environmental Education Instructors and Volunteers to provide public programming

over **950**

Adults involved in programs like Driftless Dialogue Lecture Series, Wisconsin Master Naturalist Training, Teacher Continued Education Credits, and Community Saturday Programs



1,450

Community Workshop
Attendees

250

Youth attended
Summer Adventure
Camps

20

area school districts who visit from a 50 mile radius

&

2,100

students and teachers for field trip visits each year

THE KVR SERVES



WI DPI AWARDED

\$700,000

in grant monies in 2020 to develop and launch a free public Kickapoo Valley Forest School, a partnership between the Kickapoo Valley Reserve and the La Farge School District



Land Management

The State of Wisconsin and Ho-Chunk Nation jointly manage the KVR with an awareness that the resources protected are not isolated from the surrounding communities and environment but are inextricably linked to them. The primary purpose of ecosystem management is to conserve, restore, and maintain the ecological integrity, productivity, and biological diversity of these public lands.

1 Recreation

The KVR has vast recreational opportunities. The trail system is designated for the silent sports of equestrian, biking, hiking, kayaking and canoeing. Year round camping is also available.

In addition to recreational trail and campsite use, visitors also enjoy bird watching, wildlife viewing, personal use foraging, hunting, fishing, trapping, dark sky viewing, geocaching, viewing ice formations, ice skating, sledding, fall foliage viewing and other nature-based recreation.

50+

Miles non motorized multi season trails

26

Primitive campsites

15.7

Miles natural surface trails

45

Miles Class 1 Trout Streams

4.45 Miles of paved greenway trail - "Old 131 Trail"



2 Habitat Enhancement

Kickapoo Valley Reserve continues its efforts to promote diverse ecological communities that support biodiversity. Staff work diligently to identify and control impact of invasive plant species. Control efforts utilize an integrated (chemical and physical) approach to minimizing species spread and reproduction, prioritized by plant phenology and species abundance. The KVR maintains a GIS database of locations of many priority species, and observations and locations are shared with the Wisconsin First Detector Network (University of Wisconsin), via the GLEND App. To date, there are over 800 points, 113 sites and 14 species.

Hay Valley Boardwalk Project



KVR staff work toward a sustainable trail system and to protect sensitive natural communities from user impacts. Detailed site assessment and planning activities during FY 2019 – 2021 allowed improvement of a degraded section of the Hay Valley Trail to be enhanced, protecting stream and wetland communities and improving the user experience. The project was completed in July 2021.



- Installation of 120 feet of galvanized steel boardwalk with "Rumber" surface.
- One stream crossing.
- Improvement of 300 feet of connecting trail
- 882 onsite work hours involving 18 staff and volunteers.
- Total project cost of \$25,500 was offset by donated \$11,500 in volunteer labor.



Land Management

2 Habitat Enhancement cont.

Staff also coordinate appropriate land/habitat management actions that support biodiversity at landscape and local scales. Over 400 species of plant and 100 species of nesting birds have been documented on the property. During FY 20-21, staff conducted prescribed burning on 107 grassland acres, an understory burn to control invasives and restore native understory in a recently-thinned 18-acre pine stand, and Timber Stand Improvement to enhance oak seedling establishment in a 30-acre oak stand.

4900	1500	850	860
Acres of forest cover	Acres of wetland	Acres of grassland	Acres of leased agricultural land



Prescribed Burn on the KVR

3 Research and Community Outreach

The KVR continues to support and host research efforts that inform management actions. In 2019, UW-Madison staff completed a breeding bird survey as part of a long-term monitoring effort, that will allow inferences regarding wildlife response to future management actions.

Staff also coordinate monitoring activities with volunteers to identify rare plants so that they may be protected. During FY 2021, volunteers identified a population of over 400 nodding pogonia, a plant listed as a Species of Special Concern by the Wisconsin DNR. Such findings emphasize the importance of the property as a refuge for rare species.

During FY 2020, 5 plant identification walks were held with over 60 participants, local elementary students assisted with the establishment of 8 acres of pollinator habitat, and local high school students helped with exotic species removal efforts. Staff also developed two resource guides for the public, one on wildflower identification and one providing users a checklist of the birds that utilize the KVR.



Weister Creek Habitat Improvement Project

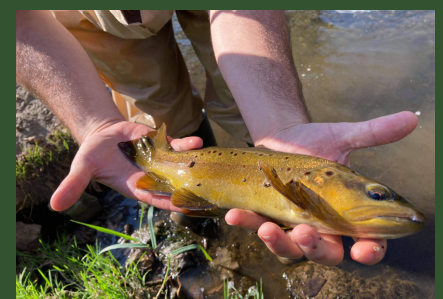
Streams are mirrors that reflect the impacts of surrounding land use and management actions. Increased runoff and erosion during the period of heavy agricultural use has led to excessive siltation, altered stream morphology and impaired ecology of many Driftless Area streams.



During FY 2020, 2.8 miles of Weister Creek was restored via streambank stabilization and sloping, removal of adjacent woody vegetation, and installation of lunger structures, weirs, and other in-stream habitat structures. KVR staff designed and installed parking lot and project signage and developed and maintained an adjacent trail system and native grassland vegetation.



The stream now supports a healthy trout population and has become popular among anglers, helping to support the \$1.6 billion annual economic stimulus fishing provides each year to the Driftless Area.



Land Management

4 Law Enforcement

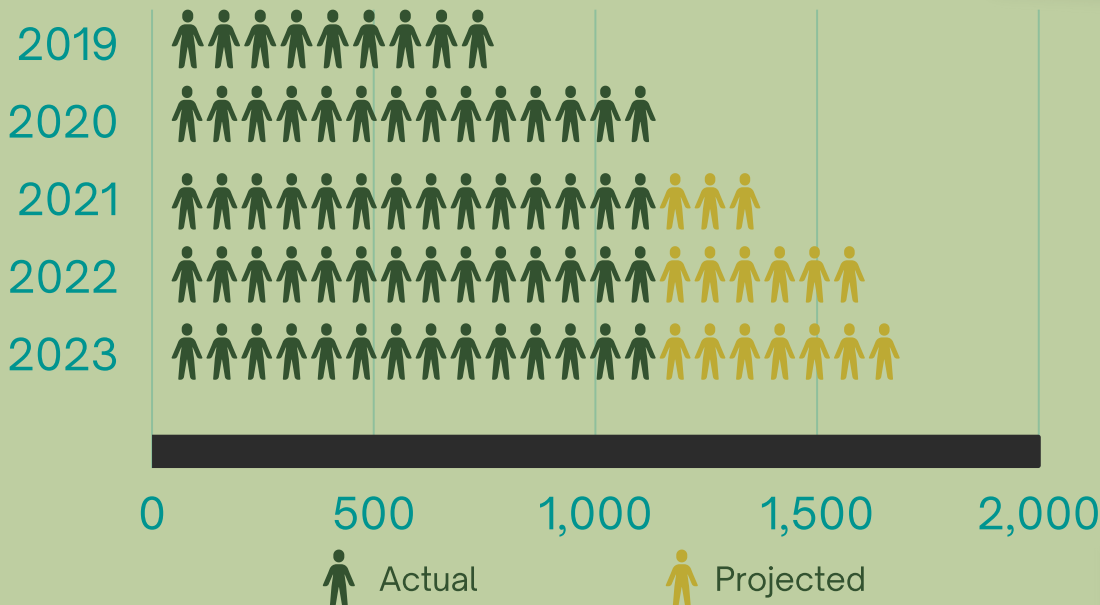
The Kickapoo Valley Reserve has its own Police Department to enforce State Laws and Administrative Rules on the Reserve.

There is one full-time officer who also doubles as the Property Manager, and part-time officers. Officers patrol the property and contact visitors during their stay and address any issues that come up. They also provide visitor assistance and customer service. They are well versed on the rules and do a great deal of public relations. Contact with hundreds of visitors is made each weekend, from busy canoe landings, trail users, hunters, anglers and remote campsites, ensuring safety while protecting the KVR resources for future users to enjoy.



Recreational Use Growth

Outdoor public spaces have seen exponential growth. This chart shows actual and projected KVR annual permits.



67%

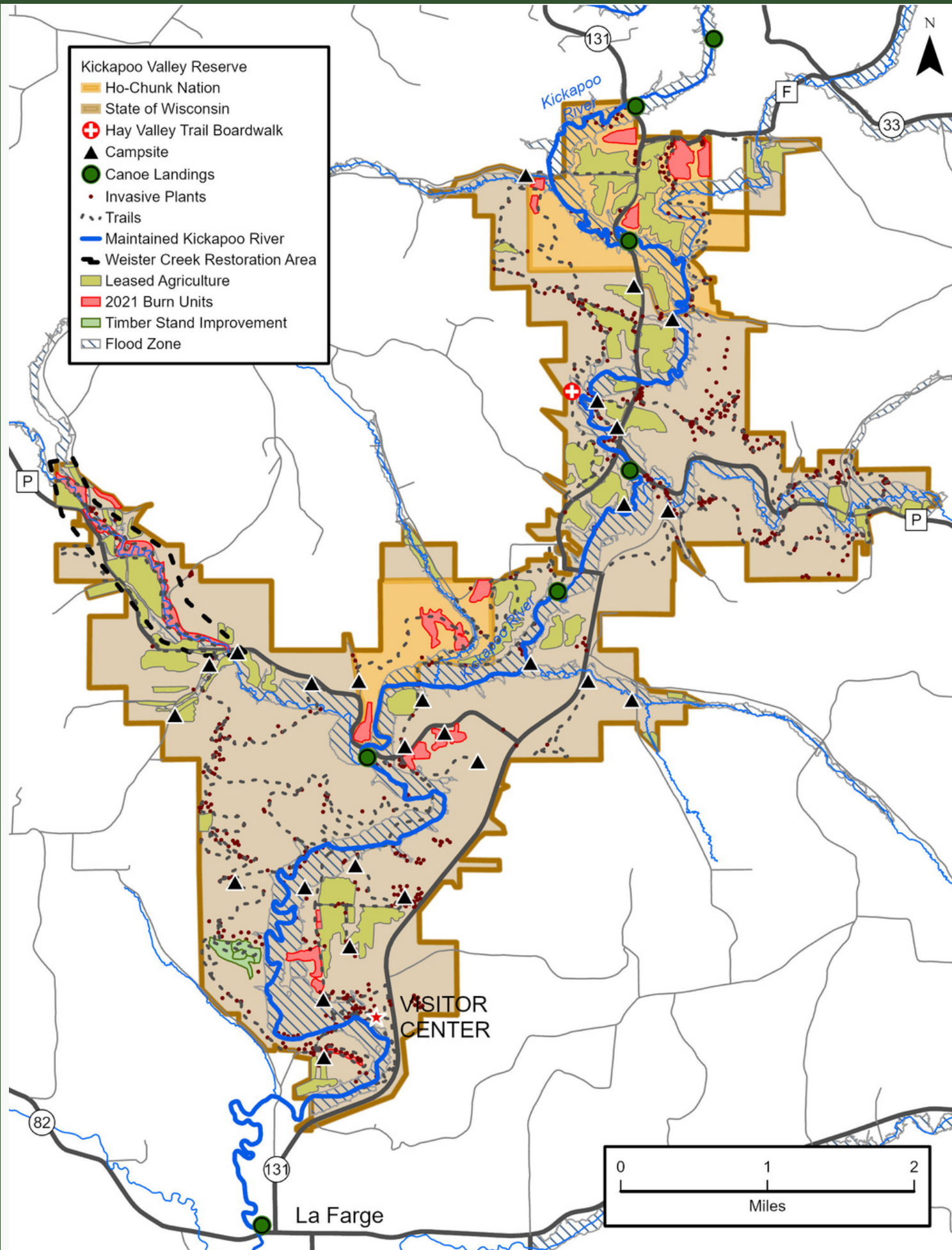
Annual permits are Family permits

42%

First time Annual Permit holders

28% Annual visitor permit increase in FY20-21





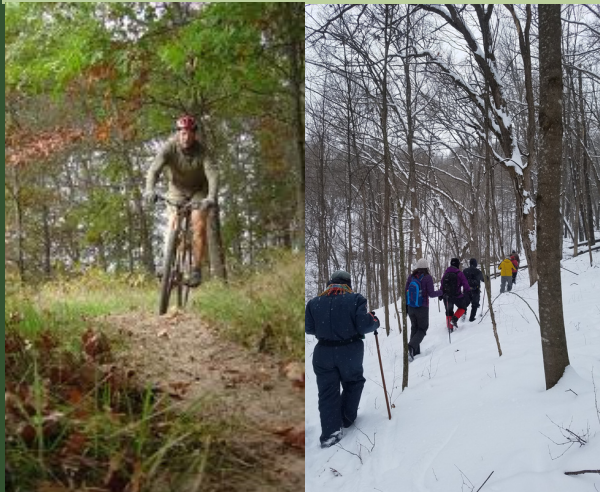
FY 2020-2021 Performance Measures

Performance Measure	Goal FY20	Actual FY20	Goal FY21	Actual FY21
Visitors at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center	16,000	15,260	5,000 ¹	10,850
Visitor Center building days used for non-Kickapoo Valley Reserve events, meetings, or programs	50	66	25 ¹	46
Trail infrastructure repair, reroute, and development	10 miles	8 miles	10 miles	12 miles
Number of annual passes issued- trails and river access use	1,000	930	1,300 ¹	1,120
Habitat restoration: trout stream projects and/or prairie restoration	75 acres	75 acres	85 acres	50 acres
Forest management: inventory, harvest, or restoration	500 acres	500 acres	500 acres	250 acres
Interactive Exhibit Upgrade ²			Design & fundraising (\$600,000)	Designs near final; \$540,000 raised
Student attendance for Outdoor Education Program	4,200	3,703	1,000 ¹	2,210
Kickapoo River maintenance for canoe/kayak access	15 miles	15 miles	15 miles	15 miles

¹Goals for FY21 were revised due to public access issues related to COVID-19.

²New performance measure for FY21.

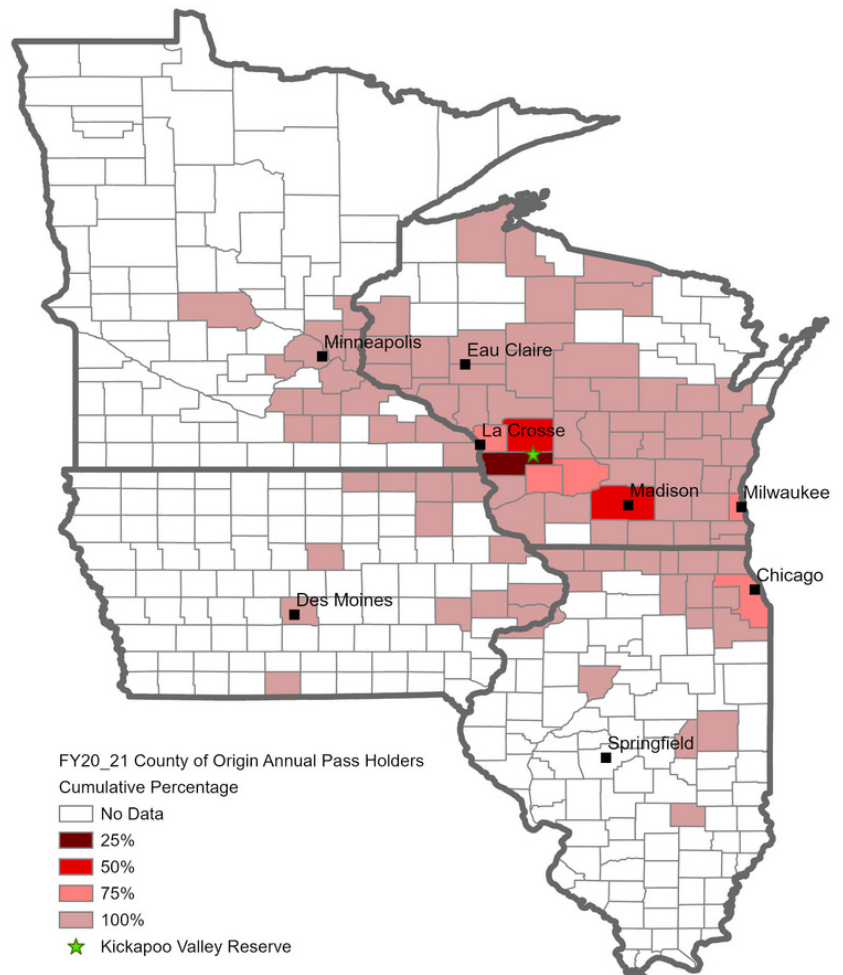
32% Increase in camping and day use



253 Unique zip codes of visitor origin



County of origin for KVR Annual Pass holders FY20-21



Measuring Progress

Performance toward FY 22-23



Performance Measure	Goal FY22	Goal FY23
Visitors at Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.	17,000	20,000
Visitor Center building days used for non-Kickapoo Valley Reserve events, meetings, or programs.	50	50
Interactive exhibit upgrade ¹ .	Complete exhibits	Increase number of year-round visitors
Trail infrastructure repair, reroute, and development.	10 miles	10 miles
Number of annual passes issued- trails and river access use.	1,400	1,500
Habitat restoration: trout stream projects, invasive species control or prairie restoration ² .	500 acres	500 acres
Forest management: inventory, harvest, or restoration	500 acres	500 acres
Student attendance for Outdoor Education Program.	2,500 ³	5,000
Kickapoo River maintenance for canoe/kayak access.	15 miles	15 miles

¹New performance measure for the biennium.

²Performance measure has been modified for the upcoming biennium.

³Charter school agreement begins with the La Farge School District.



Goal to welcome

800+

Attendees to Winter Festival

Present
20+
Informative
lecture topics

Projected
\$600,000

Discovery
Center
Completion

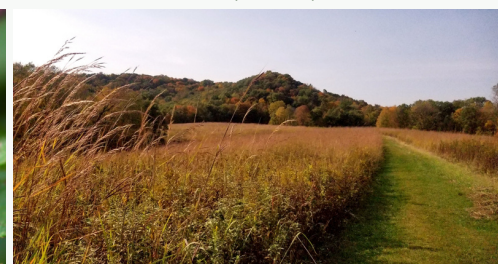
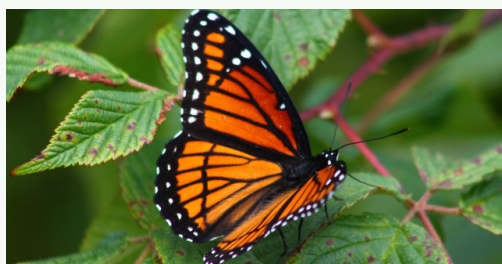
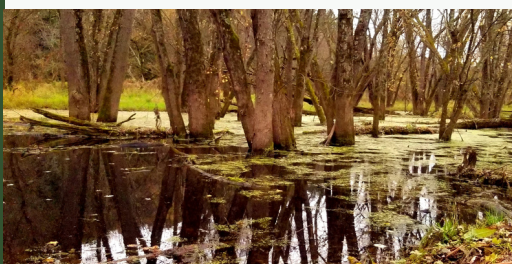
Projected
50%
Increase in
student
programming



Goal to welcome

500

Dam Challenge participants



FY 21-23

Programs, Goals, Objectives and Activities



Goal:

Increase the number of visitors at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitors Center.

Objective/Activity:

Expand educational and special events to year-round activities. Overhaul and upgrade exhibit designs.

Goal:

Continue to manage the Kickapoo Valley Reserve infrastructure improvements including trail and river access conditions for hiking, horseback riding, biking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, trout fishing, kayaking/canoeing, hunting and snowmobile trail enthusiasts.

Objective/Activity:

Improve and maintain nearly 60 miles of multiuse recreation trails. Focus on flood resiliency and sustainability.

Objective/Activity:

Maintain kayak/canoe access for 15 miles on the Kickapoo River.

Goal:

Manage the 8,600-acre property in accordance with the founding agency mission to preserve and protect.

Objective/Activity:

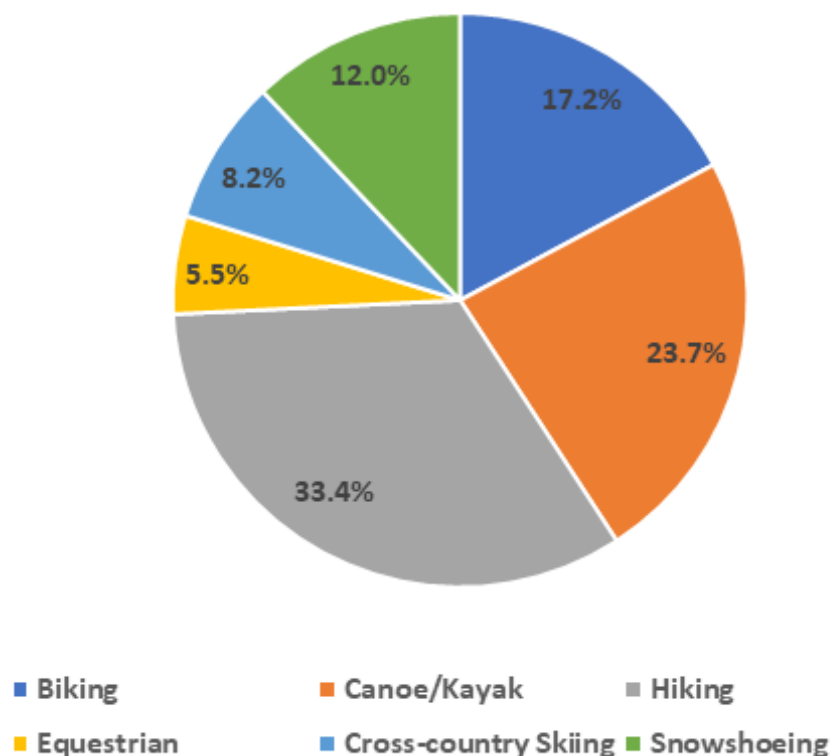
Remove invasive species to enhance diverse flora and fauna.

Objective/Activity:

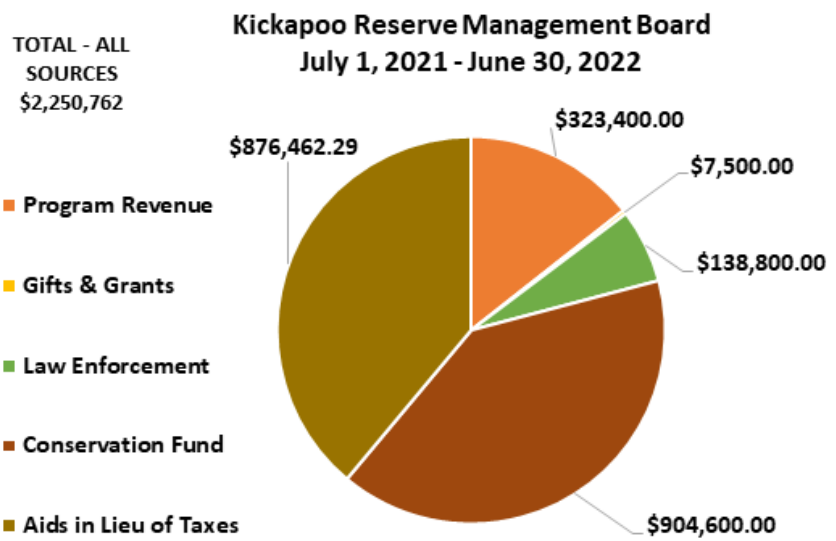
Continue sustainable timber harvests and mixed hardwood plantings to generate revenue and enhance future forest products.



Silent Sport Participation by a Sample of 3,162 KVR Users*



*From a sample of permit sales. The property is also used extensively by hunters and anglers.



Statement on Flexible Work Schedules

- 1 The Kickapoo Reserve Management Board understands the importance of providing flexible work schedules to employees, recognizing that core services must be available for public users during established business hours. The KRMB is committed to working with staff to address situations where traditional work schedules do not fit the employee's needs, and to accommodate requests for flexibility where operationally feasible.
- 2 The KRMB has 4 FTE employees, and numerous seasonal LTES and contractors. Office hours are 8:00 a.m. through 4:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Daily work hours are also 8:00 a.m. through 4:30 p.m. Monday – Friday, with staff rotating Saturday shifts to ensure public services remain available to users at the Visitor Center.
- 3 Covid-19 guidance required closure of the Visitor Center from March 15th 2020 – April 4th 2021. Staff were provided the opportunity to work from remote locations via Telework Agreements. All staff returned to work at the Visitor Center upon re-opening of the building on April 5th, and all IT and other office equipment used to facilitate teleworking has been returned to the state office space.

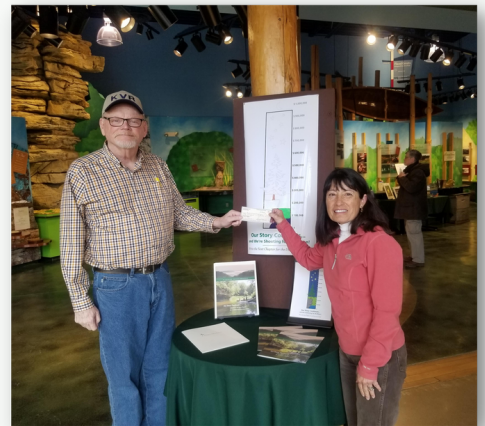


Friends of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve



The **Friends of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve** is an 501c(3) non-profit organization of people dedicated to assist the Kickapoo Reserve Management Board in its mission to preserve and protect the lands entrusted to the Reserve by raising funds and public awareness, and by providing volunteers for needed projects.

Notably, the Friends have been an integral part of a fundraising campaign to upgrade the educational exhibits at the KVR Visitor Center. \$540,000.00 has already been raised toward the \$600,000 goal.



1 Board of Directors

KVR Friend Board of Directors is comprised of seven KVR Friend members that are elected to each serve three year terms.



L to R: President – Tom Miron, Vice-President – Sally Colacino, Treasurer – Marcia Bader, Secretary – Pam Saunders, Member – Joan Peterson, Member – Joan Kent, Member – Patty Kinsey

2 Initiatives of Support

The KVR Friends raise funds in order to provide additional support for the KVR in the following areas:

- Property Maintenance and Improvement
- Education and Events Programming
- New Initiatives
- Miscellaneous purchases

3 Provide Volunteers

The KVR Friends host a number of great events and provide volunteers for the KVR's big events. Event volunteers play a major role in making events at the KVR successful!



Acknowledgements

Many groups and individuals work tirelessly to achieve the mission of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve.

Kickapoo Reserve Management Board

KVR Staff

Friends of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve

Ho-Chunk Nation

Partnerships and Supporters:

Organic Valley, Town of Stark, Go-Macro, Vernon Communications Cooperative, Vernon Electric Cooperative, The Ralph E Nuzum Kickapoo Reforestation Fund, UW Madison College of Agriculture & Life Sciences, La Farge Schools, Viroqua Food Coop, Prairie Springs Trust, Village of La Farge, La Farge Emergency Services, WI DNR, Vernon County Sherriff's Department, Town of Whitestown, Vernon County Emergency Management, USGS, Vernon County Land and Water, Wildcat Mountain State Park.

Volunteers:

Adopt a Trail, Citizen Scientists, Events, Paddler Pick Up, Disaster Relief



Contact

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Executive Director - Kickapoo Valley Reserve
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